

# News Release

## *Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge*

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### **DEER FLAT NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE AT LAKE LOWELL CELEBRATES CENTENNIAL**

#### **Refuge & Reservoir History**

2009 marks the centennial of Lake Lowell and Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge. The climate and soils of the Treasure Valley make it one of the west's best farming regions, but without Lake Lowell and other parts of the Boise-Payette Irrigation Project, much of southwest Idaho could not have been settled. Early residents of the Treasure Valley settled near the Boise, Payette, and Snake Rivers to irrigate with river water, but more water was soon needed to support a growing population. Private irrigation companies weren't up to the challenge, so in 1902 President Theodore Roosevelt established the U.S. Reclamation Service (now known as the Bureau of Reclamation) to "reclaim" the west's arid lands through irrigation.

James H. Lowell, president of the Boise-Payette Water Users Association, lobbied the U.S. Reclamation Service to fund an irrigation system in the Boise Valley. Because of Lowell's visionary efforts to raise matching funds and gather the support of local farmers and politicians, Deer Flat Reservoir was renamed Lake Lowell in 1948.

Creating a lake in the Deer Flat basin near Nampa and Caldwell was an enormous undertaking. Unlike most reservoirs, built by damming a river, Deer Flat Reservoir was built in a basin with no natural rivers. Crews expanded or built forty miles of canal to bring water from the Boise River. To contain the water,



they built four earthen dams more than three miles in total length. They used only steam shovels, train cars, and horse teams to move four million cubic yards of gravel, dirt, and lava rock. That much material piled on a football field would be more than a quarter of a mile high—more than three times taller than the Space Needle in Seattle. The two major Deer Flat dams were built between 1906 and 1908.

With the stroke of a pen on February 25th, 1909, President Theodore Roosevelt signed Executive Order 1032 establishing Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge. Although originally built for irrigation, President Roosevelt realized that a lake in the desert would also be a wildlife oasis. Just three days after Boise River water was released into the New York Canal to begin filling the reservoir, Roosevelt set aside Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge as the 21st refuge in the National Wildlife Refuge System. The refuge now provides sanctuary for migratory birds and other wildlife on nearly 12,000 acres, from the open waters, wetland edges, and sagebrush uplands at Lake Lowell to the grasslands and riparian forests on over 100 islands in the Snake River.

### **Centennial Festival**

On Saturday, June 6th, Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge at Lake Lowell will celebrate 100 years of working together for wildlife at a grand Centennial Festival. This free, family-friendly event will include children's activities, informational booths, displays of art from local wildlife artists, guided tours and talks, a barbecue, live music, and the grand opening of a new historical interpretive trail.

The Centennial Festival will be held from 11 AM -3 PM. A local Boy Scout troop will kick off the festival at 11:00 with a flag raising ceremony. Throughout the day there will be informational booths from a variety of local wildlife-, history-, recreation-, and agriculture-related organizations as well as guided walks and talks about wildlife and history. Kids will particularly enjoy the craft activities, including fish printing, mask making, and face painting. They may also spot either the large blue goose, mascot of the National Wildlife Refuge System, or T.R. Bear, a mascot representing President Teddy Roosevelt, founder of the National Wildlife Refuge System and of Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge.

The Centennial Festival will also mark the grand opening of the new Centennial Trail. This historical interpretive trail was funded by a grant to the Friends of Deer Flat Wildlife Refuge from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and supported by 10 local partners. The 1.2-mile, disabled-accessible trail will go from the refuge visitor center to and across the Upper Dam. Along the trail there will be interpretive signs about the history of the refuge and reservoir, allowing visitors to discover the challenge of



surviving in the dry, dusty desert of southwest Idaho, the difficulty of constructing Lake Lowell to bring irrigation water to the fertile lands nearby, the tremendous influence of the lake on people and wildlife, and how citizens and partners have worked together to make sure Lake Lowell continues as an oasis for people and wildlife in its second century.

A barbecue from 12:00 to 2:00 PM will feature hamburgers, hot dogs and other goodies for purchase. Visitors can enjoy their meal while listening to the Treasure Valley String Quartet playing a variety of music, from the Vivaldi's "Four Seasons" to the "Dances with Wolves" theme and from bluegrass to fiddle music. The refuge birthday cake will be cut at 1:00 PM and be available free to all attendees.

The festival will also showcase the Friends of Deer Flat Wildlife Refuge's work to insure that this wildlife treasure will exist for at least the next 100 years! Attendees will be able to participate in four ongoing Friends' fund raisers.

Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge and the Friends of Deer Flat have arranged with Bitner Vineyards to create limited edition special-label bottles of "Mallard Merlot" and "Shorebird Chardonnay" to commemorate the Centennial. The labels were designed by Anica Hopkins, a student at the College of Idaho. Profits from the sale of this limited-edition wine will be used to fund ongoing and new conservation and education programs at the refuge. Centennial Festival visitors will be able to place wine orders.

Visitors will also be able to see a model commemorative bench for the new Centennial Trail and donate money towards an Eagle Scout project to build additional trail benches. A plaque will be attached to each bench acknowledging the donor.

Orders will be taken for engraved bricks to be placed in the hummingbird and butterfly garden at the refuge Visitor Center. The garden is currently being refurbished as an Eagle Scout project. The bricks cost \$25.00 and can be engraved with up to three lines. Proceeds from sale of the bricks will go to the Friends Educational Outreach Program to help fund the refuge's on- and off-site environmental education programs that reach thousands of local kids each year.

Finally, a beautiful quilt, hand made by Nancy Smith and donated by Dr. and Mrs. Watkins, will be on display. Raffle tickets will be on sale at the Centennial Festival for \$5.00 each or five for \$20.00. The quilt will be awarded to the lucky raffle winner at the annual refuge BioBlitz Festival on July 18, 2009.



Centennial Festival admission is free and the cost of the barbecue will be less than \$10. The refuge Visitor Center is on the west side of the Upper Dam at Lake Lowell. The new Visitor Center entrance road is at the intersection of Indiana and Roosevelt. For more information about the Centennial Festival, please contact the refuge at (208) 467-9278 or [deerflat@fws.gov](mailto:deerflat@fws.gov).

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